

# Shop Talk at Thirty

By Robert U. Brown

## Attack from the right

The press of this country, and perhaps of this hemisphere, has had the mistaken idea that military dictatorships of the right have become a thing of the past and the biggest threat to freedom in Latin America now comes from Fidel Castro and his type of exported Communism.

In the last 15 years we have witnessed the fall of such renowned dictators as Peron, Rojas Pinella, Trujillo, Somoza and Perez Jimenez. A year ago the Inter American Press Association viewed the Latin American scene and found that freedom prevailed everywhere with the exception of Castro's Cuba, "Papa Doc's" Haiti, and Stroessner's Paraguay with some improvement noted in the latter.

The picture was bright, but soon to be darkened.

Almost before you could say "military coup," the president of Peru was placed on a plane leaving the country and the government was taken over by a military junta which lost no time in closing temporarily three publications which it didn't like.

The newly elected president of Panama was in office only a few days when he received the same treatment from the military which has attempted to perpetuate its own brand of a free press by installing its own hand-picked editors on all publications not in sympathy with the regime.

### Publisher jailed

The army generals in Brazil moved into the President's office there and, although he has been permitted to stay in office, he has become the pawn of the military suspending freedom of the press and civil rights which he had declared sacred only a few months before.

Editors and publishers went underground and some of those who didn't were detained by the military for brief periods. Mrs. Niomar Bittencourt, widow of the late Paulo Bittencourt and publisher of *Correio da Manhã* of Rio, was in jail for over two months and just recently released. President Costa e Silva had told a delegation from the Inter American Press Association that the nation's free press was safe even though an infamous Press Law existed.

The law was brushed off and

used almost as the IAPA group walked out the door.

What provokes military officers to take the law into their own hands as they have done in Peru, Panama and Brazil?

Dr. Joao de Medeiros Calmon, president of *Diarios Associados*, gave an insight in a talk to the Overseas Press Club in New York this week. *Diarios Associados* was founded by the late Assis Chateaubriand (who was frequently called the "Hearst of Brazil") and now controls 15 television stations, 29 radio stations, 32 newspapers and 10 magazines.

Dr. Calmon reported:

"After the victorious Revolution of 1964, President Castello Branco sent a bill to Congress, in December 1966, creating a new and extremely drastic Press Law. We, Congressmen, struck out several articles which we thought threatening to freedom of expression. The law was promulgated by the President, who respected the amendments introduced by Congress, in January 1967. But the next month, Marshal Castello Branco issued a decree-law on National Security which brought back the very articles Congress had rejected in the Press Law.

"On February 27, 1967, the Press Law and the National Security Law came into force in Brazil. From that moment on freedom of expression in Brazil could come under serious restrictions. However, both Presidents, Castello Branco and then Costa e Silva, decided not to apply these legal instruments.

"Then, in December of last year, came the episodes that culminated in the enactment of Institutional Act Number Five, which resulted in the recession of Congress, the suspension of constitutional guarantees and the possibility of establishing censorship of the press, radio, television and telephones, the suspension of inviolability of the mails and the institution of habeas corpus.

"The military were convinced that there was a conspiracy afoot to overthrow the regime, with a threat of civil war. According to the Government secret services, 'revanchists', including bourgeois and Communist adversaries, were plotting a coup. Political leaders, priests and students.

"Why was the reaction of the armed forces so drastic?

"One shot, at Serajevo, provoked the outbreak of World War One.

"In Brazil a five-minute speech, at the end of the day's work at a session of the Chamber of Deputies, usually taken up with short comments, provoked the explosion of Institutional Act Number Five.

"In this speech, a Congressman advocated boycotting the Independence Day parade; he called the military criminals, killers and torturers of the people; he appealed to women not to go with men of the armed forces, and to the young girls not to dance with the Military cadets.

### Dragged through the mud

"These attacks deeply traumatized the military who had for some time suffered the impact of financial strain, and who usually were held responsible for the crises in the country, though these had always broken out in civilian administrations. Even in popular music, in the so-called 'protest songs', the military were dragged through the mud.

"Badly paid, misunderstood, accused of being ambitious for power when they had always preferred the Presidency of the Republic to be held by civilians, they had been more recently the victims of the phenomenon of growing proletarianization of their class in consequence of the Revolution's salary policy provoked by the anti-inflation efforts. These were the feelings of the men of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force when there fell upon them the petty accusations that represented a great anathema.

"They were pointed out as a repugnant part of Brazilian society, unworthy of the people's company in the commemorative spectacle of their Independence. Their reaction was human but controlled. In the first place they tried for a solution within the constitutional norms, asking the President to have the Congressman tried by the Federal Supreme Court, in accordance with the Constitution. The Chamber of Deputies, through faulty government leadership or because they were misinformed, declined to give consent for the trial. This congressional defeat of the Government was due to the votes of seventy members of the Government's own party. The Chamber's attitude was considered by the armed forces to be an insufferable act of collective solidarity with the in-

"As a consequence, today the newspapers, radio and television

### Negro series cited

SAN FRANCISCO

A *San Francisco Examiner* reporter, Harry Johansen, has been cited by the City Human Rights Commission for a series of articles on Negro History in California. In a citation presented to Johansen, the commission said it was sending reprints of the articles to 1,000 individuals and organizations. The articles, published last summer, were inserted in the *Congressional Record* in October by U.S. Senator Thomas Kuchel.